

IOWAccess Citizens Council Meeting
April 17, 1998, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm
Des Moines, USDA
Remote Location: Shenandoah High School

Present

Carol French Johnson, Chair
Greg Anliker
Brandon Burnett
Marvin Shirley
Jim Yenck (for Daryl Gray)
Richard Reitsma
Gordon Wigness
Jerry Smith
Dan Offenburger
Diane Kolmer
Marilyn Adams

Guests Present

Lisa Gard, Iowa Department for the Blind
Kent Hiller, Iowa Interactive
Wayne Johnson, Refugee Programs
Shannon Sasser, Iowa Department for the Blind
Herb Strentz, Iowa Freedom of Information Council
Matt Theobald, Iowa Interactive

Staff Present

Jim Youngblood, Information Technology Services
Linda Plazak, Information Technology Services
Tori Squires, State Public Policy Group
Shannon Tyler, State Public Policy Group

Welcome and Introductions

French Johnson welcomed everyone to the meeting. She asked Youngblood and Plazak to review the status of Project 1 and the status of IOWAccess bills in the legislature. Youngblood stated that the IOWAccess bill has come out of the House by a 90-6 vote and is currently in the Senate where it has meet a lot of roadblocks. Youngblood noted that ownership of the data available over IOWAccess and the responsibility for it will remain with the agencies. He also reassured the Council that there will be security in place for the data.

Youngblood stated that he has seen the presentation by the Iowa Department for the Blind and noted that this system that we are building is for all the people of Iowa, not just some. He reminded the Council that that is why there is a Citizen

Council. He stressed the need for the Council to keep bringing these issues forward.

Anliker noted that some Senators believe that a contract has already been signed with Iowa Interactive to set up the system. Youngblood stated that the contract is not yet in place.

Discussion of Translating the IOWAccess Web Page Services into Other Languages

Wayne Johnson presented information on the various languages that are currently spoken in Iowa. He noted that the desire by IOWAccess to look into translating some of the IOWAccess services is good. He noted that there is currently a bill in the legislature that would make the English the official language and this will affect translating the web page into other languages.

Johnson noted that his office works with legally admitted refugees. Currently, there are many Bosnian and Vietnamese refugees. It is estimated that there are about 20,000 people in the state who are or have been legally admitted aliens. It is also estimated that there are about 30 percent more of other status. These individuals speak between 15 and 20 different languages, and some of these individuals are not literate in their own language. It is believed that there are about four language groups with more than 1,000 individuals speaking them.

He stated that refugees need to know where they can access government information. It is essential that there are public access sites available because many will not have computers in their homes. Some will have a very good education, while others will have no education at all.

Refugees need very basic information, such as: governmental and community structures; how to get a driver's license; community agencies and what services they provide; and public library locations. Many refugees come from societies where government is not a friend or helper -- they are fleeing from government. Information on community assistance entities would also be helpful. He stated that his agency's primary purpose is finding employment for the refugees. Information about finding working or taxes (withholding information) should be considered. It's the simple things that are sometimes overlooked.

French Johnson thanked Johnson for his presentation

Iowa Dept for the Blind Presentation on Web Readers

Lisa Gard and Shannon Sasser demonstrated how web sites can be designed for use by the visually impaired. They presented how a visually impaired person uses computers and showed examples of accessible sites. Gard demonstrated how a visually impaired person uses a screen reader. Screen readers read text documents and have been used for this purpose for quite some time. This enables the individual to "read" the electronically formatted document.

Gard stated that there are many simple things that can be done by web page designers to make web sites accessible and referred to a handout on this. She showed examples of accessible sites on the web.

She stated that with a well designed site you can make the internet a tool for the visually impaired. She stated that there is really no cost for making it accessible, as it just means adding text links to a page.

Youngblood stated that it is an issue of awareness and a matter of consideration when developing accessible web pages. Plazak stated that she has worked in the past with the department and has distributed the information to all project teams. She also stated that all the state sites are not available in this accessible format but are now working towards doing this.

Sasser stated that the world wide web consortium is developing accessibility guidelines. Anliker asked if the text reader is built in or if it is something that has to be purchased. Gard stated that they must be purchased and can be expensive. The synthesizer is about \$1,000, but new developments are being made which is reducing the costs. The software itself can range from \$300 - \$800. People who need the assistive technology must buy these themselves. Gard stated that the department has programs to assist with purchasing of equipment when a business hires a person with disability.

French Johnson thanked them for their presentation. Offenburger reiterated the importance of adapting web pages for use by the visually impaired.

Discussion of Privacy Issues

Herb Strentz is the Executive Secretary of the Iowa Freedom of Information Council. He reviewed the history of the Council.

He noted that he was asked to address the Council about the Information Council's concerns about information being available over the Internet. He noted that these concerns are threefold: 1) Increasingly, he fears that we are a society that knows the price of everything and the value of nothing; 2) The Internet is over-hyped and over-rated and he fears that the Internet is not building bridges so much as building walls; 3) he believes electronic access to government information is bound to decrease the amount of and nature of public information rather than increase it.

Strentz noted that it is helpful to draw a distinction between data protection and the right of privacy. He further stated that it will become increasingly important to define why we want to see data to access it. Strentz noted that the task of the Citizen Council is interesting and challenging.

French Johnson thanked Strentz for sharing his thoughts on privacy with the Council and asked if there were questions.

Kolmer stated that a lot of these issues raised are very valid and noted that a lot of information about yourself is available if you just use a credit card. She asked how it is possible to find out if this information is accurate. Strentz noted the difficulty in changing information in an electronic age and that it may just be a fact of life now and we may just have to date records with "as of." We may have to have greater access so that we can find the records and correct them. Shirley asked Strentz if, in his opinion, it is possible to make IOWAccess secure enough. Strentz noted that it is possible.

Strentz was asked his view of the involvement of private corporations with the IOWAccess project to actually pay for some of their costs. He noted that, in his opinion, this is one of the better proposals compared to what has been done in the past. Strentz stated that the proposal anticipates and/or addresses some of the "horror" stories from other states, and noted that it has taken into account the mistakes of other states. Plazak reiterated that the agencies will still own the data and they will determine what information is public or what is private.

Strentz noted that one thing IOWAccess might want to stress is its statewide identity – it is the only entity offering this service.

Anliker asked how the projects are dealing with the security issue and will people find a way to get around some of the security efforts that are being built. Plazak stated that Project 1 is responsible for the infrastructure that will handle the security. She further stated that there probably is no such thing as an absolute secure system. Plazak stated that Iowa Interactive has not had a security breach in any of the other seven states in which they work.

Report and Update on Progress of Project 1

Plazak stated that the contract with Iowa Interactive is not signed yet. She stated that they have met with all the project teams to assess their progress. Plazak noted that the vast majority of the projects are moving forward and are on target with their timelines.

Hiller suggested the Council look at the other state web pages their organization has set up. These include Indiana www.ai.org; Kansas – www.ink.org; Nebraska – www.nol.org; Arkansas -- www.ark.org; Georgia – www.ganet.org; and Virginia – www.vipnet.org.

Hiller stated that one of the reasons they have been successful is that they customize each states web site. He also noted that Iowa Interactive's is to develop the website the way IOWAccess wants it. He stated that IOWAccess has taken a much different approach than any other state they have worked for as to the way the citizenry is involved as well as all levels of government. Hiller noted that Theobald and Steve Schrader have been brought in to work on the project and the rest of the staff will be hired from Iowa.

Reitsma noted that there are several local communities that are getting web sites up on their own and asked if there is any effort to link these to IOWAccess. Plazak noted that an effort will be made to tie these in to IOWAccess. She also noted that there will also be an effort to provide communities with less technology expertise template web pages. These templates will make it easier for communities to create their own web page.

Digital Signature Legislation and IOWAccess Legislation Update

Plazak stated that the digital signature bill passed the House, but died in a Senate committee. The stated objection was that they felt that they should wait for uniform digital code to be developed at the federal level which is approximately four years away.

Discussion on Issues of Concern for the Council

Anliker stated that his biggest concern has been the security of the data, and felt that this has been addressed today and he feels more comfortable about it now.

Shirley asked that access to the system remain a focus for the projects. Plazak noted that surveys of businesses and citizens were completed a few months ago. These surveys revealed that a high percentage of senior citizens feel this is a good idea, but these individuals also stated they probably wouldn't use it.

Hiller noted that they have seen a perceived fear that government employees will lose their jobs, but this has not happened. What they have found is that it decreases counter traffic by 15 percent at the Indiana Department of Motor Vehicles and has allowed staff to do more work away from the counter.

Wigness noted that the concern of the AFSCME lobbyist was who will own IOWAccess. Plazak stated that the State will own IOWAccess and Iowa Interactive will work for the State.

Next Steps for the Citizen Council

Squires stated IOWAccess staff would like input from the Citizen Council on what the projects should be considering while they are evaluating their projects between July 1 and September 30, 1998. Input should be forwarded to her within the next three weeks.

The next meeting was set for Friday, June 19 from 10:00 am – 1:00 pm. Project demonstrations will be the focus for this meeting.